March 24, 2006

NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

NOAA participates in Southern Louisiana Portfields Liaison Summit

On March 21, NOAA and EPA staff participated in a summit of Southern Louisiana Portfields liaisons at the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) of New Orleans, LA. The Portfield liaisons will work directly with the nine ports invited to participate in the May 23-24, 2006, Southern Louisiana Regional Portfields Project and Peer Exchange. The Portfield liaisons include local staff from Regional Planning Commissions, the City of New Orleans, and the NOAA navigation manager, Tim Osborn. The liaisons will play the role of coordinating activities between the ports and federal, state and local partners, and will work with the ports and partners to develop and implement priority projects. Other NOAA representatives included Kenneth Walker and Meredith Mendelson of OCRM and Brent Ache of the Special Projects Office (SPO). EPA representatives included Patricia Overmeyer and Karen Peyke of the EPA Brownfields program. For more information contact Kenneth Walker.

Sea Grass Awareness Day at Apalachicola

Apalachicola NERR in Florida will celebrate Sea Grass Awareness Day Wednesday, March 22, with displays, demonstrations and kids' activities to raise awareness of the role and fragility of coastal sea grasses. The day is part of the statewide Sea Grass Awareness Month. Exhibits will include a live sea grass tank and an exhibit on non-damaging boating practices. There will also be a demonstration on how biologists sample sea grass beds. Fun activities will include word puzzles, building a sea grass community picture, and viewing microscopic organisms that live in and on sea grass. The events are aimed at raising awareness of the problems facing this important natural resource and how sea grass damage can impact both the economic and ecological value of marine resources. For more information, contact George Cathcart.

National Weather Service Dedicates New Hurricane-Resistant Weather Forecast Office in Key West

NOAA's National Weather Service dedicated a new, hurricane-resistant weather forecast office in Key West, Fla., today. The new facility is designed to withstand wind speeds and storm surge levels associated with a catastrophic Category 5 hurricane. "Florida took a terrible beating from four land falling hurricanes in 2004. Hurricanes last year shattered nearly every record set in previous seasons," said Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. "This new facility helps ensure our National Weather Service staff is able to continue providing critical services to our citizens in the Keys and our marine community during the worst weather conditions."

"The past two years have demonstrated how devastating the hurricane season can be for Florida and the potentially dire conditions National Weather Service employees must endure to conduct their mission of protecting residents," said Bill Proenza, director of the National Weather Service Southern Region.

Early in the morning of October 23, 2005, the new weather forecast office faced its first real challenge as the eye of Hurricane Wilma passed just 70 miles north of the Keys at Category 3 intensity. While it wasn't a worst case scenario, Hurricane Wilma battered Key West with wind gusts in excess of 100 mph

and a six-foot storm surge. However, office staff, family members and key emergency management personnel were safely sheltered in the new weather forecast office building.

“The facility provided additional peace of mind for the staff and family members who stayed there,” said Matt Strahan, meteorologist-in-charge of the Key West weather forecast office. “Not having to worry about our safety makes it much easier to concentrate on our mission.”

Constructed with a combination of concrete, reinforcing steel and hurricane impact-resistant glass, the new facility was built to withstand sustained winds of 165 mph. The interior contains an additional concrete structure designed to serve as a Severe Weather Occupancy Shelter to protect against winds up to 250 mph.

The new facility is located approximately a half-mile from shore and six-and-a-half feet above sea level. The interior floors are an additional seven feet above the grade for a combined height of 13.5 feet above sea level, which is 2.5 feet above the anticipated storm tide of a Category 5 hurricane.

The National Weather Service forecast office in Key West is one of 122 forecast offices in the United States and one of 32 serving the Southern Region. It is responsible for providing weather, hydrologic and climate forecasts and warnings from Key West to Ocean Reef, portions of the southeastern Gulf of Mexico and the Florida Straits. According to U.S. Department of Commerce estimates, about 40 percent of the world’s shipping passes through the waters covered by the forecasts and warnings issued by the Key West office. National Weather Service in Key West: http://www.srh.noaa.gov/eyw

NOAA Continues Effort to Provide Safe Navigation in the Gulf Region Following the 2005 Hurricane Season

This week, a significant hazard to navigation and fishing located near the Chandeleur Islands was reported to NOAA and the U.S. Coast Guard by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Department of Natural Resources. NOAA has provided a chartlet of the hazard, a steel structure rising just above the water level, to assist in safe navigation of the area. A Local Notice to Mariners has also been issued by the U.S. Coast Guard and a NOAA chart update will be made. For more information, contact Tim Osborn.

Emergency Managers Have Improved Inland Flood Forecast Tool

NOAA's Coastal Services Center and National Weather Service, working in partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Sea Island Software, Inc., have enhanced an inland flooding forecast component to HURREVAC, a computer program used by government emergency managers. Shorthand for "hurricane evacuation," HURREVAC is a computer program used by more than 4,450 government emergency managers. The software combines FEMA's and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' hurricane evacuation data with NOAA's current weather forecast data, allowing users to estimate evacuation times as hurricanes and related hazards threaten a given area. The enhanced component will address growing concerns about damage caused by flooding from coastal storms, and enable emergency management throughout New England to quickly compare flood inundation maps with forecasts of rainfall and river levels. In the last 33 years, 82 percent of U.S. deaths related to tropical cyclones have resulted from flooding. The component includes real-time NOAA river forecast information from 1,052 forecast points in 22 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Additionally 49 new maps have been added to HURREVAC, bringing the number of maps covering

coastal states from Maine to Texas to 346. Thirty-five more maps are being developed for Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. http://hurricane.ncdc.noaa.gov/cgi-bin/hsei/hsei.pl?directive=welcome

NCCOS Review Links Iron to Toxicity of Certain Harmful Algal Blooms

A scientist with the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science has completed a review of the effect of iron and other trace metals on toxic algal blooms. Recent research suggests that atmospheric iron inputs to the Gulf of Mexico stimulate blooms of the red tide dinoflagellate Karenia brevis, which produces brevetoxins that can kill fish and make humans ill. In addition, iron limitation stimulates the release of the neurotoxin domoic acid by the diatom Pseudo-nitzschia. This algal species blooms along the west coast of the US and has poisoned humans, sea mammals, and birds. The review, entitled "Trace Metals and Harmful Algal Blooms", is found in *Ecology of Harmful Algae*, Vol 189, chapter sixteen of the book series, Ecological Studies, to be published in September 2006. For more information, contact Bill Sunda.

In the Gulf States:

Rookery Bay Provides Green Industries Training

Rookery Bay Research Reserve is providing Green Industries Best Management Practices training, Keeping your Landscape Green & Florida's Water Clean training, for the City of Naples Parks and Parkways staff and other private landscapers. Participants stated that the training filled a gap in our region and 100% said they would recommend the program to other landscape professionals. Also, the evaluation specifically asked if they would adjust their application of fertilizers and pesticides/herbicides with nearly 60% saying they would and wonderful quotes about how they now understand the effects of their workplace practices on water quality. For more information contact Tabitha.Stadler@dep.state.fl.us.

Florida's Acceler8 Project Bringing Benefits to St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon

--State launches third project of the year to fast-track Everglades restoration--

MARTIN COUNTY – In another milestone for Florida's Everglades Acceler8 initiative, State Senator Ken Pruitt, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Colleen M. Castille and South Florida Water Management District officials today marked construction on the $330 million C-44 St Lucie Canal Reservoir and Stormwater Treatment Area. Part of the State's plan to fast track the restoration of America's Everglades, the massive reservoir and treatment wetland will capture, store and treat water from the 116,516-acre C-44 basin to improve water quality, revitalize wildlife habitat and improve the health of the St. Lucie Estuary and Indian River Lagoon.

"Cleaning and restoring a more natural flow of water to the River of Grass is a massive undertaking. No other government in the world has attempted an environmental task so large and important to its citizens," said DEP Secretary Castille. "Under the leadership of Governor Bush, Florida has committed more than $3 billion to clean up and restore the Everglades, which today is putting projects in the ground ahead of schedule to realize the environmental benefits sooner than anticipated."

Water managers are constructing two temporary four-acre reservoirs, known as test cells, that will provide storage for more than 39.1 million gallons of water. The test results will ultimately be used to enhance the timing and delivery of water flow to the St. Lucie Estuary. The SFWMD is also building two test areas of treatment wetlands to determine the best grading techniques and vegetation growth conditions for the construction of larger stormwater treatment areas that will use plants to naturally cleanse excess nutrients from water. Slated for completion in three months, the pilot projects will provide engineers with critical water quality and seepage information to design and build the entire C-44 reservoir and stormwater treatment area on former agricultural land.

Located halfway between Lake Okeechobee and the ocean in Martin County, the completed C-44 reservoir will span 3,400 acres holding water up to 15 feet deep. The above-ground reservoir will provide 50,600 acre-feet of water storage -- the same capacity as 25,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools. The massive water storage area will work together with 6,200 acres of stormwater treatment area to capture and treat water before it is released to the C-44 Canal and flows to the Indian River Lagoon and St. Lucie Estuary. The first phase of full project construction will begin in the fall.

“This project not only advances the critical restoration of the Indian River Lagoon, but the stormwater treatment areas associated with this project will go a long way to address the serious water quality problems experienced in the St Lucie River,” said SFWMD Executive Director Carol Ann Wehle. “Improving water quality is essential for the ecosystem, businesses and citizens of the area.”

Announced by Governor Bush in October 2004, Acceler8 is stepping up the pace of funding, design and construction to complete eight critical Everglades restoration projects over seven years. At substantial savings to taxpayers, the projects will restore 100,000 acres of wetlands, expand water treatment areas by close to 29,000 acres and provide 418,000 acre-feet of additional water storage for Everglades restoration a decade ahead of schedule. The C-44 Project is the fifth Acceler8 project now underway and the third Acceler8 project launched this year. The State began expanding three treatment wetlands in February and launched similar test cells for the Everglades Agricultural Area reservoir last year and the C-43 Caloosahatchee West Storage Reservoir just last month.

Under the leadership of Governor Bush, Florida forged a 50-50 State-federal partnership to implement the $8 billion Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan and has invested $1.3 billion and committed an additional $3.2 billion through the end of the decade to clean up and restore the famed River of Grass. For more information on Acceler8, visit www.evergladesnow.org.

New Web-Based Parish Recovery Planning Tool Available through LouisianaSpeaks.Org

Baton Rouge, LA-Today the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR) team is launching a new web-based Parish Recovery Planning Tool (RPT). Planners, government leaders, community organizations, stakeholders and the public will be able to use the Parish RPT to view recovery planning efforts in Louisiana parishes impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Created by the Louisiana LTCR team, in partnership with federal agencies and the LRA, the Parish RPT represents an important step in Louisiana recovery planning and is a significant contribution from FEMA to continued recovery planning in Louisiana.

"This dynamic and interactive new tool will support ongoing recovery efforts and help facilitate continued planning at the parish level," said Andy Kopplin, Executive Director of the Louisiana Recovery

Authority. "By providing access to large amounts of community-specific planning information, the tool adds simplicity to what is otherwise a complex process."

To access the web-based planning tool, go to www.LouisianaSpeaks.org and click on the Parish RPT icon. In addition to recovery planning, the Parish RPT facilitates planning management and project implementation. Project information can be accessed by parish or by one of nine sectors -Environmental Management, Housing and Community Redevelopment, Economic and Workforce Development, Public Health and Healthcare, Transportation and Infrastructure, Education, Public Safety, Human Services and Flood Protection and Coastal Restoration. Sectors represent areas of specific interest to Louisiana recovery.

Project implementation tracking is also available. "The Parish RPT is the first of its kind and represents an exciting new dimension in community-based recovery planning," said Walter Melnick, Deputy Director of FEMA's Long Term Community Recovery team. "Recovery planning information from multiple parishes can be shared through the use of the Parish RPT, encouraging cooperation and collaboration among federal, state and local recovery stakeholders," Melnick continued.

Since October, LTCR Planning Teams have been working with local officials and community residents in impacted parishes to develop parish-specific recovery plans. Through this process, each parish crafted its own vision, identified goals and priorities, conducted needs assessments, developed a community baseline and identified priority projects. While many projects are important to the community, not all community-identified projects are included in the Parish RPT. Some ideas are not specific to recovery. Others may need additional study. Still, others may be included in other recovery efforts or

Programs - such as the FEMA Public Assistance program, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers levee projects currently underway or planned for. Because the LTCR process is designed to support and compliment existing community planning, projects found in existing community planning activities such as comprehensive, mitigation or transportation planning, may also not be included in the Parish RPT.

Recovery projects included in the Parish RPT are ones that directly address the needs resulting from the disaster and are additional to those already planned through other programs. Higher recovery value projects are consistent with community recovery visioning and goals, focus on overall community recovery and can achieve multiple recovery benefits. Recovery projects that are "catalytic" to recovery in that they "jump start" community recovery efforts or are necessary for other recovery projects to progress, are included. Instead of a listing of capital improvement projects or those that only address pre-disaster conditions, recovery projects provide an opportunity for a community to improve upon pre-disaster conditions and leverage recovery resources in a sustainable manner.

Key community planning leadership, in partnership with the LRA, will be able to update their plans on the Parish RPT to reflect changing conditions as new community needs are identified. Today's press conference includes a demonstration of the Parish RPT's capabilities and adaptability to support continuing community-driven planning. Individual sources for Parish RPT project funding must be identified and pursued and inclusion in the Parish RPT is not an indication that projects will be funded. Potential funds needed are estimates that have also been developed by individual parish participants. The Parish RPT builds local capacity to develop grant applications and pursue other funding processes by capturing project descriptions and other important information needed by prospective funding partners.

The LTCR effort has been coordinated through a partnership of the LRA and FEMA as a part of LOUISIANA SPEAKS. State partners include Louisiana Office of the Governor, Louisiana Departments of Health and Hospitals, Transportation and Development, Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana Housing Finance Agency Office of Community Development and Center for Planning Excellence. Participating

federal agencies include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation; the U.S. Economic Development Agency; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Local Workshops Help Make Homes More Hurricane Resistant

Release Date: March 21, 2006

BATON ROUGE, La. -- Louisiana residents will benefit from mitigation workshops to be held in Covington , Denham Springs, and Slidell. These workshops are designed to provide information on how to protect homes against future hurricanes and are offered by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in partnership with home improvement centers. Building techniques to make homes more hurricane resistant will be discussed.

“These workshops, led by FEMA mitigation specialists, will discuss the two critical areas of wind and flood hazards”said Scott Wells, the federal coordinating officer. “Everyone is invited and we urge everyone to attend, including homeowners, building contractors and architects”.

Workshops will be held MAR. 23-25, 2006-- 8:00 a.m. to 5:00p.m. at:

- Home Depot 12300 I-10 Service Rd. New Orleans , La.; Slideshows at: 8:30 a.m. 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. 3:30 p.m.

- Lowe's 3640 Vet. Mem. Blvd. New Orleans , La.; Slideshows at: 8:30 a.m. 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. 3:30 p.m .

Home ownership will continue to be the largest lifetime investment for residents. Rebuilding properly with the best technical guidance and using tested techniques will assure that homes will be fortified against and more resistant to hurricane forces.

LDEQ to Demonstrate Value of Treated Wastewater to Wetland Growth

BATON ROUGE – Many coastal communities have turned to wetlands assimilation projects as a way to handle treated wastewater, revive wetland areas and improve water quality.
On Friday, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality will be taking those interested in the projects on a field trip of a wetland assimilation project in Thibodeaux. Registration for the field trip begins at 9:30 a.m. at Jean Lafitte National Historical Park & Preserve, Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center, Jean Lafitte Acadian Cultural Center at 314 St. Mary St. The wetlands assimilation projects take treated wastewater and distribute it in wetlands areas. The nutrients from the treated wastewater help plants and trees grow, improve water quality and enhance the wetland ecosystem.

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, there has been new-found interested in wetlands projects. Because of the importance of wetlands as a buffer from storms and the important role they play in the ecosystem, the federal government has offered some funding option for these projects.
The field trip will include discussion on funding options for coastal communities interested in starting a project, as well as the many benefits such a project would bring to the communities.

Recovery Opinions Sought During Mississippi Public Meetings

Release Date: March 24, 2006

BILOXI, Miss. -- Harrison County's Hurricane Katrina recovery will be highlighted at two public meetings in early April where residents can learn about potential long-term community projects and voice their opinions about recovery plans. The open house meetings are set for April 3 at the Mississippi Coast Coliseum Convention Center in Biloxi and April 6 at the West Harrison County Civic Center in Pass Christian. Residents may come anytime between 5 p.m. and 8:30 p.m.

"In order for the recovery process to move ahead, public comment on these projects is necessary," said Robert Latham, director of the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. After viewing depictions of potential community recovery projects, residents will be asked to provide written feedback to express their views. Comments will be recorded for future reference.

The Mississippi Governor's Office of Recovery and Renewal, local governments and planners with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Economic Development Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are working together to identify projects that provide the maximum benefit possible in the rebuilding and recovery effort.

Final Environmental Impact Statement Published in Designation Process for Texas National Estuarine Research Reserve

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Estuarine Research Reserve System has made public, through publication in the Federal Register, the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Management Plan for the proposed Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) in Texas.

Publication of the EIS sets in motion the final steps for official designation of the 27th member of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System. The new Mission-Aransas NERR will be located in Aransas and Refugio counties about 30 miles northeast of Corpus Christi on the Texas coast. A designation ceremony is scheduled for May 6 in Port Aransas, Texas.

"Estuarine Reserves are living laboratories," said John H. Dunnigan, NOAA assistant administrator for National Ocean Service. "They provide essential wildlife habitat and great opportunities for discovery and research for the public, teachers and students and scientists."

The Mission-Aransas site was proposed by Texas Gov. Rick Perry in March 2004, after a two-year site selection process. The reserve will be managed by the University of Texas at Austin's Marine Science Institute.

"The western Gulf of Mexico has a number of unique features, including coastal prairies, oak mottes and extensive black mangrove communities that will help broaden the understanding of estuarine ecosystems nationwide, said site manager Paul Montagna. "Research and monitoring here will help coastal decision makers manage these vital resources on a foundation of sound science, and it will help to educate the next generation of marine scientists and decision makers. This is good for Texas and good for the nation."

Mission-Aransas includes approximately 185,708 acres and would be the third largest reserve in the system. The reserve includes wetland, upland and marine environments typically found in the western Gulf of Mexico.

Laurie McGilvray, chief of NOAA's Estuarine Reserves Division, said. "The Texas reserve will expand our national reach into an unrepresented biogeographic area. It offers the local community an incredible resource to help them monitor their estuary, provide educational programs and advance the state of knowledge around this important natural resource."

The reserve will attract scientists and students from all over the nation to study at the site, including up to two national graduate research fellows funded annually by NOAA. NERR designation ensures access to funding for research and education programs, environmental monitoring and science-based training programs for coastal managers and decision-makers.

Grant Opportunities

NOAA Marine Debris Grant Program

The NOAA Marine Debris Program provides competitive grants to finance creative and innovative proposals that seek to work with marinas, ports, and the fishing industry to significantly reduce the occurrence of debris in these areas. In addition, the Program is accepting research proposals that address the biological, social, or economic impact of marine debris on species, habitat, and coastal businesses. Proposals must clearly define a marine debris problem that applicants are seeking to address and explain how the project will provide measurable benefits for coastal and marine resources. Projects should define a time-line for project implementation. Focus areas are:

> *Clean Ports and Marinas* – Projects that look to create or improve best management practices of ports and marinas to decrease the threat of marine debris to marine life and navigational safety.
>
> *Clean Oceans* – Projects that work with the fishing industry and/or fisheries councils and organizations to develop better solutions to reduce derelict fishing gear in the marine environment.
>
> *Marine Debris Research* – Projects that improve understanding of the sources and impacts of marine debris on marine mammals, sensitive habitats, tourist and fishing industries, and navigational safety.

Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, other non-profits, commercial organizations, and state, local, and tribal governments whose projects have the potential to benefit NOAA trust resources through marine debris research and prevention projects. Matching funds are not required under this program; however, they are strongly encouraged. Proposals that can demonstrate at least a 1:1 match will be most competitive. For more information: http://nfwf.org/programs/marine_debris.cfm or http://www.marinedebris.noaa.gov.

Submit a pre-proposal via the Foundation's on-line pre-proposal application by **June 1, 2006**. Upon receipt and competitive evaluation of the pre-proposal, the Foundation will invite successful applicants to submit a full proposal. Applicants will be notified by **mid June 2006** as to the status of their preliminary applications and whether they are invited to submit a full proposal. Awards for this program are scheduled to be announced in **late October**.

Training and Conferences

CREST April 18, 2006 Workshop

The Coastal Restoration through Science and Technology (CREST) program will be hosting a workshop on 18 April in the Rotunda Auditorium of the Energy, Coast and Environment Building at LSU on Riverine Process Re-establishment and Reintroduction. The aim of the meeting is to consider how diversions might best be used, in conjunction with other restoration techniques, to help restore the wetlands.

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Presentations from Program Managers' Meeting Now On Line

Presentations from each session of the 2006 Ocean and Coastal Managers' Meeting are now online in PDF format on the **OCRM Web site**.

Did you find this edition useful? Please send suggestions, comments, and new items for publication to Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov